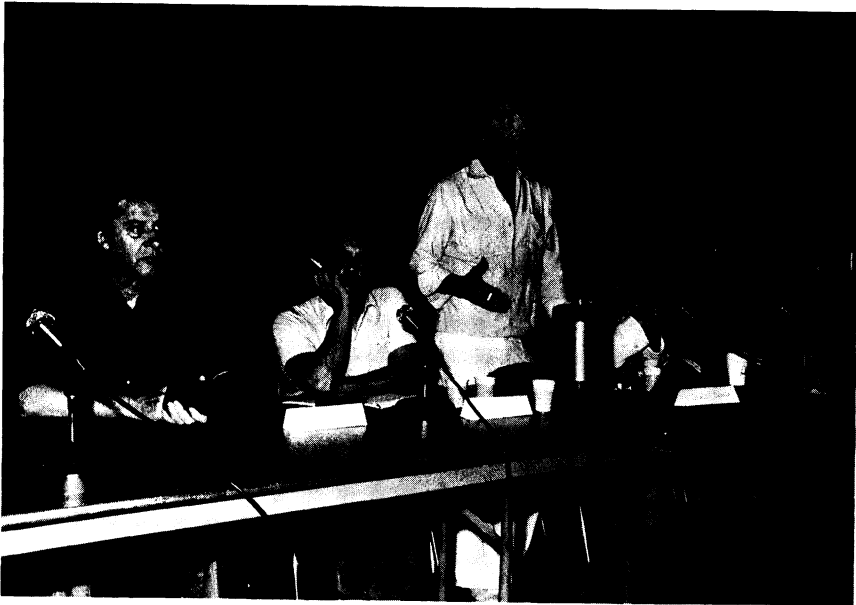


Update: Symposium on Latin American Theatre (April 19-21, 1979)

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Edward Albee was recently quoted as saying that dramatists in the United States would do well to look south of the border for new sources of inspiration. Albee, who helped organize the recent Theatre in the Americas Festival held at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and in various New York City theatres, praised the vitality, daring and sophistication of contemporary Latin



Miami, April 1979: José Monleón, Alonso Alegría, Osvaldo Dragún, Griselda Gambaro, Isaac Chocrón.

American theatre, noting that its divulgence and appreciation in this country are long overdue. While it is true that many theatre artists and the general public of theatregoers in the United States have been largely ignorant of dramatic trends and events in the Southern Hemisphere, such is not the case in most of our universities, where the teaching and research of Latin American theatre have burgeoned in the last decade. Proof of this is the second Symposium on Latin American Theatre, held at Miami International University last April 19-21. (The first such Symposium took place at Pennsylvania State University in October, 1976). As Professor Frank Dauster emphasized in his keynote speech, Latin American theatre, as an aesthetic phenomenon and a legitimate field of study, has come of age.

During the Symposium speakers representing numerous universities across the country touched on both general and specific topics concerning twentieth-century Latin American drama. Panoramas of Brazilian, Peruvian, Puerto Rican and Post-Revolutionary Cuban theatre were complemented by discussions on distinct theatrical modes in various countries (absurdist theatre, tragedy, the theatre of disruption and reconstruction), and by analyses of the work of individual playwrights (Julio Ramón Ribeyro of Peru, the Argentine Eduardo Pavlovsky, Enrique Buenaventura, Sergio Magaña, the Chileans Egon Wolff and Sergio Vodanović). An entire session was dedicated to Hispanic theatre in the United States, most specifically to the *teatro chicano*, to the Compañía de Teatro Bilingüe from Texas A & I University, and to the plays of the Cuban Matías Montes Huidobro. Women playwrights were grouped together in a separate session that covered the works of Marcela del Río, Griselda Gambaro, Luisa Josefina Hernández, and Myrna Casas.

The Symposium participants were treated to two very special events: the presence of noted Latin American playwrights and three evenings of play presentations. Griselda Gambaro, Osvaldo Dragún and Alonso Alegria were in Miami for the duration of the Symposium and their participation and support gave an added stature to the proceedings. Dragún's review of contemporary Argentine theatre offered a personal recounting and interpretation of the artistic and social influences that have molded that country's theatrical development. In an outstanding talk Gambaro discussed the role and mission of women playwrights in Latin America. Isaac Chocrón, who arrived in Miami in time to participate in a round table composed of critics and dramatists, spoke enthusiastically of the public and state support that Venezuelan theatre is presently enjoying. During this same round table José Monleón, the well-known Spanish theatre critic, sparked a lively discussion about the pros and cons of studying Latin American drama in isolation of its everyday theatrical reality. Although opinions varied, the general consensus among the playwrights present was that North American scholars have contributed some of the soundest and most incisive analyses of their plays, and that this scholarly work is and should be distinct from that of the on-the-spot theatre critic, who reviews plays with an eye to meeting a daily or weekly deadline.

On the first evening of the Symposium the Compañía de Teatro Bilingüe performed a bilingual production of Dragún's *Historias para ser contadas*; that is to say, the playlets were first presented in Spanish and then in English. The

young actors gave a lively and suitably professional performance of the *Historias*, and it was most interesting to experience them in both their original language and in translation. Joe Rosenberg, the group's director, explained however that the Spanish version was modified where necessary to better express the linguistic and cultural heritage of the actors (all of them Mexican American) and of the largely bilingual audience for which this production was originally conceived. The English rendition beautifully captured the essence of Dragún's original, while giving it a decidedly Southwestern (or perhaps Tex-Mex would be more precise) flavor. The following evening the Florida International University Theatre Group, under the able direction of visiting director Alonso Alegría, performed three one-act plays. Julio Ramón Ribeyro's *El uso de la palabra*, a comical yet pathetic exposé of an aspiring writer who conceals his mediocrity behind a smokescreen of linguistic gibberish, was a respite between two Enrique Buenaventura plays (*La autopsia* and *La orgía*), with their intensely dramatic and deadly serious tone. *La orgía*, in particular, was powerful for its glimpses into a world of degradation in which man's most basic needs are grotesquely manipulated in a frightening confrontation between the oppressed and the oppressor. The Symposium's final event was a visit to Miami Dade Community College, to see the premiere of *El viaje* and *La abuela*, by the Cuban poet Orlando González Esteva. Performed by the Bilingual Theatre Group Prometeo, these works touched on the themes of exile, old age and the strong bonds of the Cuban family structure, themes which most certainly struck a sensitive chord in the audience, judging by its visible reaction to the events on stage. Also, if audience size is anything to gauge by (these plays opened to a thoroughly packed house), then there is indeed in Miami a significant and vibrant Cuban theatre in exile.

The successful three days of the Symposium were due in no small measure to Professor Maida Watson-Espener of Florida International University, whose hard work, patience and courtesy were valued more than she can imagine. All of us who traveled to Miami extend our appreciation and thanks to Professor Watson-Espener, as well as to the following institutions and organizations which helped to sponsor the Symposium: The National Endowment for the Humanities; The Caribbean-Latin American Studies Council and the International Affairs Center of Florida International University; and Miami Dade Community College, New World Center Campus.

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